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Twenty Years On

Author(s): JEFFREY A. ENGEL

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A Better World . . . but Don't Get Carried Away: The Foreign Policy of George H. W. Bush Twenty Years On*

The Bush years were memorable to be sure. Historians will surely find much fodder for future debate as they attempt to unravel all that occurred, its underlying reasons, its consistency with past traditions of American policy, and its ultimate meaning.

Not those Bush years; their earlier vintage. This issue of *Diplomatic History* explores the foreign policy of George H. W. Bush's presidency, which surely ranks among the most meaningful for American diplomacy of any four-year term in the nation's history. Yet despite the passage of time—it is now twenty years since his 1989 inauguration—Bush's fundamental diplomatic principles, and the overarching impact of his tenure in office, remain open for debate. Part of this confusion stems from the widespread perception of Bush's realism, which favored flexible considerations of American needs and power above inviolable statements of principle. Bush's own discomfort with public declarations of his guiding principles surely contributes to the lack of consensus over his foreign policy beliefs, as does the relative paucity of available documents from his presidential administration. Even the controversial legacy of George W. Bush clouds historical judgments of the elder President Bush, especially given the desire of many contemporary commentators to praise and, ironically at times even distort, the father's record in direct proportion to their criticism of the son's.¹

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1. Research materials are increasingly available from the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas. As of May 2009, 18 percent of the nearly 8 million pages of documents have been declassified. The remainder is subject to review following Freedom of Information Act requests. Archivists are currently processing several large files of particular interest to readers of this journal, including the Brent Scowcroft Papers (which total 32 cubic feet); follow-up requests for the Desert Storm/Persian Gulf Files (20 cubic feet); and in 2009 they expect to add an additional 22 cubic feet of material on North and South Korea; 12.8 feet of Panama files; and 10 cubic feet on the Middle East Peace Process. Additional information on

A generation after Bush's presidency, the time has come to look with fresh eyes at this man generally remembered more for diplomatic than for domestic accomplishments. Bush governed during tumultuous years indeed. The Cold War ended; the Soviet Union ceased to exist; Germany was reunited. Violence in Tiananmen Square portended a China potentially divided, while a surprising lack of violence emerged from the ashes of communism in Eastern Europe, save for a divided Yugoslavia where ethnic conflict emerged at a level unseen in Europe since the 1940s. American forces removed Manuel Noriega from power in Panama, attempted to restore order in Somalia, and further east led a massive international coalition against Saddam Hussein's army. Negotiations for the North American Free Trade Association largely concluded, offering a controversial vision of a continent economically joined. Political union seemed possible elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere as well. The Sandinistas ceded power in Nicaragua, while El Salvador enjoyed its first real cease-fire in years of bloody civil war. In Europe, preliminary talks for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion simultaneously began to shape a new and contentious vision of a Europe devoid of its Iron Curtain. Bush simultaneously oversaw trade negotiations with Japan during a period when the balance of global financial power appeared poised to move across the Pacific. In short, with the end of the bipolar system that had largely governed international relations for nearly a half-century since World War II, the world itself seemed in flux. One or perhaps two such events would have been enough to occupy any White House's attention. They all occurred during a single four-year period.²

current holdings may be obtained at http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/finding_aids (Information provided by Chief Archivist Robert Holzweiss, April 30, 2009, correspondence with author.) Readers should also note that the Bush Library offers generous bursaries, administered by Texas A&M University's Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs, to fund research in these holdings, but have in recent years suffered from a paucity of applicants. For more information see <http://bush.tamu.edu/scowcroft/grants/>.

2. Histories of the period and biographies of Bush abound. Special attention should be paid to the foreign policy memoirs coauthored by Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York, 1999), arguably the most insightful of all postpresidential memoirs. Useful primers on Bush's foreign policy include Ryan Barilleaux and Mark Rozell, *Power and Prudence: The Presidency of George H.W. Bush* (College Station, TX, 2004); Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston, 1993); Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World* (Lexington, KY, 2008); Colin Campbell and Bert Rockman, *The Bush Presidency: First Appraisals* (Chatham, NJ, 1991); Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York, 2008); Michael Duffy and Dan Goodgame, *Marching in Place: The Status Quo Presidency of George Bush* (New York, 1992); John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of George Bush* (Lawrence, KS, 2000); Christopher Maynard, *Out of the Shadow: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (College Station, TX, 2008); David Mervin, *George Bush and the Guardianship Presidency* (New York, 1996); Richard Rose, *The Postmodern President: George Bush Meets the World* (Chatham, NJ, 1991); and Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York, 1991).

For Bush, a useful starting point is his (edited, but nonetheless revealing) *All the Best* (New York, 1999), a collection of letters and diary entries composed over a lifetime. For biographies, see Richard Ben Cramer, *What It Takes* (New York, 1993); Timothy Naftali, *George H.W. Bush* (New York, 2007); Herbert Parmet, *George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York, 1997); and Tom Wicker, *George Herbert Walker Bush* (New York, 2004). A brief synopsis is

Bush was hardly responsible for the changes that occurred around him. Historians debate the role played by contemporaries in winning these achievements. Some consider Ronald Reagan the catalyst for Washington's Cold War victory. Looking to the dramatic fall of communism in Europe in particular, others credit Soviet visionaries such as Mikhail Gorbachev, international reformers such as Pope John Paul II, or dissidents such as Lech Walesa or Vaclav Havel and those they led. Such debates over why, and because of whom, the Cold War ended will not be settled soon. Though Bush did not foster such change on his own, as the following pages demonstrate, he was well aware that the wrong move at every turn could snatch defeat—and anarchy—out of the jaws of potential triumph and peace.³

Critics have long charged that Bush failed to match the potential of his era with a commensurate level of conviction or international imagination, largely because Bush failed to provide words equal to the times, and additionally because Bush's devotion to stability and order did not lend themselves to passionate oratory or revolutionary zeal. Indeed, this article argues that Bush's ill-defined international vision appeared unoriginal because at its core the international system he envisioned following the collapse of European communism was the very American-led international order articulated in his youth by American leaders at the height of World War II and in the first years of the Cold War. Bush is best understood as the culmination of a long-standing American vision, not as the progenitor of something radically new.

Those who search his words or deeds for radicalism will be disappointed. Never the most eloquent of presidents, Bush "resisted using any word that someone else gave him," Marlin Fitzwater, his press secretary, explained, "mostly out of a stubborn resistance to being 'handled'." Bush believed his personal integrity, and that of his office, demanded that he employ only those words that came to him naturally. And what came naturally was, more often than not, devoid of grand philosophical statements or expressions of inviolable principles. For historians eager to label grand articulations of strategy ("containment," "a world safe for democracy," "axis of evil") Bush's verbal inefficiencies make for poor copy indeed. "My problem, very frankly," Bush said in 2000, "was that I wasn't articulate. I didn't feel comfortable with some of the speechwriters' phrases, so I would cross them out. I didn't quote Shelley and Kant.

Michael Beschloss, "George Bush, 1989–1993," in Robert A. Wilson, ed., *Character Above All* (New York, 1995). See also the first publication of Bush's diary, Jeffrey A. Engel, *The China Diary of George H.W. Bush* (Princeton, NJ, 2008).

For discussion of NATO expansion, see Mary Sarotte, "Not One Inch Eastward?" in this *Diplomatic History* forum.

3. The literature on Reagan abounds, but for a recent summary—and pointed argument in favor of Reagan's influence—see James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York, 2009). For a recent comprehensive look at Gorbachev's role, see William Taubman and Svetlana Savranskaya, "If a Wall Fell in Berlin and Moscow Hardly Noticed, Would it Still Make a Noise?" in Jeffrey A. Engel, *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York, 2009).

I didn't remember exactly what Thucydides had meant to me when I was only twelve."⁴

Discomfort with scripted statements did not equal isolation, however. Bush spoke frequently to the media, averaging more than a press conference a week during his presidency. This is more than Reagan, Bill Clinton, and certainly George W. Bush. Such access revealed his comfort with off-the-cuff policy discussions but simultaneously highlighted his discomfort with broad statements of principle. As Bush's close friend and national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, explained, "He does not talk in a philosophical way. He's uncomfortable talking in his way." Bush's White House advisers recognized that analysts might mistake his rhetorical modesty for a lack of abiding principles. When asked to define one of Bush's most famous terms, his conception of a post-Cold War "new world order," for example, Fitzwater conceded, "well I don't think it ever really got defined. . . . He never tried to lay it out. The problem with that, of course, is that it leaves a vacuum of definitions and that others can jump in and fill."⁵

Contemporary critics frequently inferred from this lack of soaring rhetoric and clearly defined definitions less a predisposition toward political caution than a dearth of guiding principles. Not surprisingly, Bush rejected this charge out of hand. "I'm the President that the national press corps felt had no vision," he told one 1995 interviewer, "and yet I worked for a more peaceful world. . . . I think the pundits had it down that I had no vision, but I did. . . . It doesn't have to be done with the most rhetorical flourish. It has to be your inner self. It's got to drive you." In truth, this defense itself does more to obfuscate Bush's interna-

4. For Bush's press conferences, see Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 1. See also Martin J. Medhurst, "Why Rhetoric Matters: George H.W. Bush in the White House," in Martin J. Medhurst, ed., *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush* (College Station, TX, 2006), esp. Catherine L. Langford, "George Bush's Struggle with the 'Vision Thing'," in Medhurst, *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush*, 35.

5. For Fitzwater, see Roy Joseph, "The New World Order: President Bush and the Post-Cold War Era," in Medhurst, *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush*, 97. For "does not talk," see author interview with Brent Scowcroft, March 8, 2007.

Conservative critics in particular attacked Bush's use of the term "new world order," even as candidate Bill Clinton made more of Bush's term "vision thing." As Clinton explained in 1992, "of all the things George Bush has ever said that I disagree with, perhaps the thing that bothers me most is how he derides the American tradition of seeing and seeking a better future. He mocks it as the 'vision thing'." Patrick Buchanan derided Bush in 1992 as too willing to forsake American interests for his internationalist vision. "He is a globalist and we are nationalists," Buchanan charged. "He believes in some Pax Universalis; we believe in the Old Republic. He would put America's wealth and power at the service of some vague New World Order; we will put America first." Indeed, some on the extreme right considered Bush's talk of a "new world order" to be more than just a restructuring of traditional international relations. His lack of specificity, Pat Robertson preached, concealed nothing less than "a tightly knit cabal whose goal is nothing less than a new order for the human race under the domination of Lucifer and his followers." For Clinton, see "Acceptance Speech to the Democratic National Convention," July 16, 1992. For Robertson and Buchanan, see Joseph, "The New World Order," 97. For a discussion of Bush's religious principles, see Andrew Preston, "The Politics of Realism and Religion," in this *Diplomatic History* forum.

tional values than to clarify them, further highlighting his misfortune of being bracketed by Reagan and Clinton, two of the White House's most effective communicators. As Bush explained, the vision underlying a foreign policy "can be a personal thing. It can be your set of values. Your vision can be 'I want to live to this code of behavior.'"⁶

Bush's "code of behavior," itself ill-defined, had deep roots in American diplomatic history. Indeed, the lack of soaring rhetoric paradoxically matched the purposeful lack of innovation Bush's team saw as its fundamental goal: fulfillment of an international system articulated by every American administration since World War II. Of greatest significance for understanding Bush's broad policy goals is appreciating that the post-Cold War world he and his advisers envisioned during his presidency, revealed not only through his relatively infrequent prepared statements from the bully pulpit but also through the actions of his administration, mimicked the post-1945 world American leaders aspired to lead before the Cold War thwarted their internationalist plans. Bush easily fell back on tropes that sounded routine to contemporary ears, employing broad and easily accepted terms such as "democracy," "freedom," and "stability," because in truth the post-Cold War world he envisioned was itself an extension of American maxims well developed over the course of his lifetime. There was, quite intentionally, very little new or innovative in Bush's vision of American leadership in the world. He hails from a long line of American statesmen determined to place America at the head of a world system considered in Washington's best interest, and, in their eyes, in the world's best interest as well.

While drawing out this comparison between the world Washington's leaders envisioned after 1989 with that articulated after 1945, the following pages trace the evolution of Bush's international worldview, focusing on three aspects of his diplomatic style: his ingrained multilateralism, which reserved a special place for American global leadership; his respect for stability and sovereignty as foundations for sustainable international order; and his devotion to personal diplomacy and concurrent disdain for harsh rhetoric likely to stroke popular passions. Each of these diplomatic traits grew from experiences that informed Bush's thinking before he assumed the Oval Office. Each influenced the post-Cold War world he aspired to mold during his presidency. So, too, did each of Bush's fundamental diplomatic traits shape his response to the major crises of his presidency.

6. Bush is a man whose statements are not easily parsed. As with so many of his quotes, this statement is best read in its entirety: "Vision is an interesting word. I'm the President that the national press corps felt had no vision, and yet I worked for a more peaceful world. And we did something to say to a totalitarian dictator in Iraq, you're not going to take over your neighboring country. There's a vision there, which was peace. So, I'm a little defensive in the use of the word. Because I think the pundits had it down that I had no vision, but I did. You need a vision, you need a central core. You need to say, 'Here's what I'm going to try to do to make life better for others.' It doesn't have to be proclaimed in the fanciest prose. It doesn't have to be done with the most rhetorical flourish. It has to be your inner self. It's got to drive you." See Academy of Achievement Induction Interview, June 2, 1995, <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/busoint-1> (accessed June 1, 2007).

The end of the Cold War seemed for Bush and for those around him validation of American values and policies. American leaders believed democracy had won, actively vanquishing their long-term adversary. They had not merely survived and transcended communism. They had defeated it. Successful completion of the national mission that had consumed most of their lives did not, consequently, demand deep examination of American values or strategies for the post-Cold War world. Why mess with success, in other words, and revamp a strategy of democracy, liberal markets, and open trade, that had succeeded in vanquishing communism, and that was intentionally universal in its appeal and applicability. “We know what works,” Bush declared in his 1989 inaugural: “Freedom works. We know what’s right: Freedom is right. We know how to secure a more just and prosperous life for man on Earth: through free markets, free speech, free elections, and the exercise of free will unhampered by the state.” Of course, one could imagine the more radical George W. Bush uttering the same phrase. The difference between the two was not one of conviction, but of action: whereas one sought to impose democracy, markets, and freedom, the elder Bush more contentedly believed history, and time, to be on his side. At the end of the Cold War, Bush offered an American style of diplomacy for the future, which embodied the lessons he believed had won the Cold War itself. American foreign policy in the decades to follow can largely be explained as an extensive effort to replicate this successful strategy at a far faster pace than the senior Bush envisioned.⁷

Subsequent events make the confidence of 1989 appear quaint in retrospect. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the shockingly peaceful revolutions of the Soviet Bloc offered for a plethora of contemporary commentators a moment of unqualified optimism following the tribulations of the half-century bipolar conflict. Scholars such as Francis Fukuyama achieved international celebrity for suggesting democracy’s victory over Communist rule ensured the final phase of history. More pessimistic prognosticators such as Samuel Huntington, conversely, posited that history had indeed turned an important page, though the future would bring transcultural conflicts rather than the strategic or ideologically driven ones of the past. Even as talk of a post-Cold War “peace dividend” circulated widely, a coterie of additional scholars won fame (and frequently tenure) with promises or rebuttals of a new “democratic peace.” In short, a new day for the international system seemed potentially at hand.⁸

7. George H. W. Bush, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1989. A plethora of new historical studies commemorates the 20th anniversary of the events of 1989 and ensuing end of the Cold War. These include: Joshua Clover, 1989: Bob Dylan Didn’t Have This to Sing About (Berkeley, 2009); Jeffrey A. Engel, *The Fall of the Berlin Wall* (New York, 2009); Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York, 2009); Michael Meyer, *The Year that Changed the World* (New York, 2009); Mary Sarotte, 1989: *The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 2009); and Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York, 2009).

8. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1993). Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996). Works on democratic peace theory abound. Useful primers include Bruce Russett, *Grasping the*

Embedded within each explanation for Washington's Cold War victory lay a prescription for future success. Liberal (in the structural rather than political sense) internationalists dominated during Bill Clinton's second term in particular. They praised the multilateral strength of military organizations such as NATO, which came to represent the iron fist of protection for more pacific transnational projects such as improved human rights, enhanced global trade, or a United Nations finally free to fulfill its global mandate absent its Cold War restraints. The central lesson of the Cold War for them was the stability it provided America's allies to develop under Washington's tutelage and the time it provided Washington's adversaries to discover the benefits of the American-led system. Some proved unwilling to wait, arguing that the Cold War had been an active victory of decisive action rather than the passive success of structural inevitability. Hawkish Cold War conservatives joined with their neoconservative cousins throughout the 1990s to prescribe a more actively unilateral American global presence absent the Cold War. They celebrated the rhetorical fire of Reagan's first term—even if they often rejected the second-term Reagan's willingness to negotiate with adversaries—interpreting his legacy as proof that the power of visionary ideas, if matched by sufficient brute force, could alter even the international landscape.

For others on the extremes of American politics, the central lesson of the Cold War was its uniqueness, and its omnipresent risk of a national security state without real domestic constraints, prompting a new spirit of conservative isolationism epitomized by Patrick Buchanan's insurgent run for the White House employing the same "Come Home America" slogan that had animated George McGovern's White House bid a generation before. No matter the particular vision, the end of the Cold War seemed pregnant with promise. As the British rock band Jesus Jones sang in a chart-topping lyric from 1991, "right here right now, there is no other place I'd rather be; right here right now, watching the world wake up from history."⁹

Such optimism appears wistfully naive in retrospect, though appreciating its ubiquity is vital to understanding Bush's reaction to, and perceived role within, the transformational era in which he governed. Bush and those around him were no less hopeful than others that the world had turned a new page by 1989. They were, however, hardly as halcyonic in their predictions. Bush, who had not come to power intent upon transforming the international system during his tenure, suggested communism's demise, when coupled with the multilateral victory in the Gulf War, augured a "new world order," though one that had to be taken with healthy doses of skepticism and apprehension. What was new in Bush's

Democratic Peace (Princeton, NJ, 2003); David R. Weart, *Never at War: Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another* (New Haven, CT, 2001); and Michael Brown, ed., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

9. Jesus Jones, "Right Here; Right Now," *Doubt* (SBK Records, 1991). The song reached #2 on the American charts, though ironically climbed only to #31 in the band's home.

vision was not its fundamentals, however, but its global applicability absent a communist challenge. Change was surely in the air, he repeatedly argued. But change did not have to turn out for the best. Absent the overriding stability of the Cold War system, Bush and his closest advisers feared any of the above crises—sweeping change in the Soviet Bloc, unrest in China, the largest American military deployment since Vietnam, or the demise of a nuclear competitor in Moscow—could spin out of control, leading to violence and instability of perhaps unseen proportions.¹⁰

Because he longed to extend the sphere of American-led democracy, bringing new areas under the American orbit of stability, Bush feared volatility most of all. His concern with “regime change” is best understood in this circumstance. For example, he argued in May of 1989 for peaceful East-West negotiations capable of producing a slow but steady strategic transformation and integration of the Soviet Bloc into the global system, rather than outright Communist collapse, hoping to “dramatically increase stability on the continent” so as to “set out a new vision for Europe at the end of this century.” By the following February, after the Berlin Wall had been breached and following his Malta Summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that formalized much of the Cold War’s conclusion, Bush elaborated his vision for Washington’s participation in Europe’s future. His language echoed earlier presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, or Dwight Eisenhower, under whose leadership the internationalism of hawkish Wilsonianism fused with the perceived lesson of appeasement’s folly into a pervasive rationale for a global anticommunist fight. “As Americans have always believed,” Bush argued, explicitly evoking politically unassailable themes of his predecessors, “our foremost goal is to prevent another world war. To do so, we will still need to remain fully engaged. European security, stability, and freedom, so tied to our own, requires an American presence. Western Europeans all want us to stay there—every single country—want us to avoid pulling back into an uninvolved isolation. I have the feeling that when the dust settles, the new democracies of Eastern Europe will feel exactly the same way. We must remain in Europe as long as we are needed and wanted.” In the final analysis, he maintained, “the prospect of global peace depends on an American forward presence.”¹¹

10. George H. W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Cessation of the Persian Gulf Conflict,” March 6, 1991, and “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit,” September 11, 1990.

11. George H. W. Bush, “Remarks Announcing a Conventional Arms Control Initiative and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters in Brussels,” May 29, 1989, and “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Luncheon Hosted by the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, California,” February 7, 1990. For discussion of Roosevelt’s international vision, a valuable recent study is Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

Bush did not warm immediately to the suggestion that Roosevelt had been a strategic role model even as he conceded the paternal presence FDR offered to a young man who had never really known another President. “I literally cried when I heard he had died,” Bush recalled, “because I thought of him primarily as my commander in chief.” However, he continued, “He was hardly a popular man in my world growing up. Nobody in my neighborhood, nobody I really knew, voted for him” (Author Interview with George H. W. Bush, December 18, 2008).

Bush's notion of American power as the guarantor of stability extended far beyond Europe. As noted, he famously declared that his generation stood on the verge of "a new world order," a term frequently recalled but less often remembered as a statement made not in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, but instead in the context of American multilateral leadership in the subsequent Gulf War two years later. For Bush the liberation of Kuwait and defeat of Iraq eradicated the painful legacy of America's loss in Vietnam. More important than salving the memory of defeat in Southeast Asia, however, was the extent the Gulf War victory reduced the post-Vietnam American reluctance to deploy military force—if done prudently and multilaterally—for the sake of international stability. Bush tied the Gulf War directly to the new breath of democratic change that had earlier swept across Europe and now seemed, of its own accord and without a direct American push, primed to transform other regions. "Our approach was to encourage [Soviet leader Mikhail] Gorbachev and the Soviet Union and to do all we could to facilitate the peaceful unification of Germany," he explained. "Then, of course, when Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, there was a real opportunity to further constructive change by getting the Soviet Union to support us in the U.N., and indeed, in the forthcoming battle to free Kuwait."¹²

This transformation of the international system from bipolar competition to multilateral cooperation echoes the expansion of democracy after 1989. Bush believed a democratic peace was best achieved by example in contrast to brute force. Harkening back to his conception of the post-1945 founders' intent, Bush instead argued for a world system "where the United Nations, freed from Cold War stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders. A world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations." Bush thought that the end of the Cold War offered his generation a "rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation," one that was "freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. . . . A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor." The new world would be, he promised, "a world quite different from the one we've known," even if it would look remarkably familiar to the world American leaders at midcentury had once envisioned.¹³

12. Bush declared the Gulf War had "kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all." James Baker, however, believed the earlier Panama invasion played just as crucial a role in exorcising the ghosts of that quagmire. "In breaking the mindset of the American people about the use of force in the post-Vietnam era, Panama established an emotional predicate that permitted us to build the public support so essential for the success of Operation Desert Storm some thirteen months later." See George H. W. Bush, "Remarks to the American Legislative Exchange Council," March 1, 1991, and James A. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York, 1995), 194. For discussion of Vietnam's strategic legacy for American policymakers and politicians, see Robert Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (New York, 2008). For "opportunity," see Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, x.

13. For "historic vision, see George H. W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit," September 11, 1990.

It would not, however, be a world devoid of conflict or strife. Optimistic at heart but no utopian, Bush believed it within his generation's grasp to "move toward" a more cooperative global system. Rather than a fully free world, a close reading of Bush's prepared statement reveals his hope of a new world order merely "freer" than what had come before. More than an entirely just world, he sought an international community "stronger" in the pursuit of justice than the Cold War had been. Ultimately, he hoped not for a perfectly secure world, but one in which humanity was, at the least, "more secure in the question for peace." The world might indeed have been waking up from history. But for Bush, a man who had seen combat and lost friends in World War II, lived through the difficulties of the long Cold War, and occupied a front-row seat in government during the tribulations of Watergate and Vietnam, change was best pursued cautiously. As Scowcroft explained, for Bush and the realist thinkers he gathered around him, the Cold War's end never promised a wholesale transformation of the very nature of interstate relations. Conflict would remain, even in an era of democratic peace. Criminals and tyrants would forever seek to exploit cracks in the international order, and the rule of law so fundamental to democratic societies demanded enforcement. Even harmonious and uniform societies required policing. Scowcroft subsequently termed their philosophy "enlightened realism," defined as the belief "that the world could be a better place . . . but don't get carried away."¹⁴

Bush believed it was a president's job to shepherd this new world through its period of change, to contain the violence and instability he could not control, and to impose structure and order whenever possible. Defeating Iraq and liberating Kuwait, removing Noriega, and pushing a humanitarian solution in Somalia were more than geopolitical necessities to his mind. These were opportunities to show the world at this critical juncture in history that order itself would prevail, that the international system would indeed function to promote

14. Author interview with Brent Scowcroft, March 8, 2007. For a discussion of Scowcroft's influential role, see Bartholomew Sparrow, "Realism's Practitioner," in this *Diplomatic History* forum.

Bush's vilification of "instability," might be one reason his own policies remain largely undefined in the public consciousness. Roosevelt and Churchill had their Hitler; Grant had Lee; Kennedy had Khrushchev; Ali had Frazier. Bush removed his own enemies (Noriega and Saddam Hussein especially) in short order. If every hero needs an antihero upon which to define his own qualities, "instability" as an enemy, for all its wisdom, made for Bush a difficult rallying cry and foil. For "enlightened realism," see author interview with Brent Scowcroft, March 8, 2007. One should note not only the healthy skepticism at play in Scowcroft's idea, but also the conditional tense he places on the very notion that the world "could" be improved. It was possible to move forward, but progress was hardly preordained. The literature on realism is vast and dense. Readers who do not wish to begin with Thucydides may instead turn for a classic example to Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA, 1979). Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions* (Ithaca, NY, 2006) adeptly surveys this literature. For a discussion of Bush's advisers, in particular their own sense of realism developed under Scowcroft's tutelage, see James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York, 2004), and David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York, 2004) esp., 260–343.

stability and to protect sovereignty absent the Cold War's structural impositions, and that might would indeed be on the side of international right. "Appeasement does not work," Bush said in response to Saddam Hussein's assault on Kuwait.¹⁵

This catechistic statement of faith was hardly novel or controversial in American politics after 1945. Appeasement had, according to received wisdom, not halted the dictators of the 1930s. Moreover, Bush advocated the kind of steady resolve in the face of aggression that had ultimately won both World War II and the Cold War, while animating less-successful American responses to crises in Korea or Vietnam. "The day of the dictator is over," Bush had earlier said in condemnation of Noriega. "All nations that value democracy—that understand free and fair elections are the very heart of the democratic system—should speak out against election fraud in Panama . . . the people's right to democracy must not be denied." For Bush the Cold War's end had indeed been a great victory, but it was the triumph of the democratic system itself—slow, frequently messy, yet inexorable—that had won the day. Power could help jumpstart this process in small arenas such as Panama. Bush was under no illusion that American power could do much to help democracy in a place such as China following the crackdown of the summer of 1989. Such events, further noted below, were unfortunate; but time remained, in Bush's mind, on democracy's side.¹⁶

More to the point, Bush believed it was American-led *international* resolve and American-led leadership of an *international* coalition of democracies that had secured the great victories of Bush's own youth and that had set the stage for the free world's triumph over communism. The grand challenges of his own post-Cold War world would, he believed, be best won in a similarly grand and international fashion. What happened to Kuwait when Iraqi troops overran the border was not merely an "American problem or a European problem or a Middle East problem," he said. It was "the world's problem," because the world was watching to see how this first major crisis of the post-Cold War world would be resolved. Sovereignty and respect for recognized borders must be maintained for the international system to function, Bush repeatedly argued, especially as he explained why it was important that the United Nations, which he considered as a result of his own service as UN Ambassador to embody the consensus of world opinion, had stood up to Iraq's aggression. "The world can therefore seize this opportunity to fulfill the long-held promise of a new world order—where brutality will go unrewarded, and aggression will meet collective resistance," he told Congress on the eve of the conflict. "Yes, the United States bears a major share of leadership in this effort. Among the nations of the world, only the

15. Jeffrey Record, "Retiring Hitler and 'Appeasement' from the National Security Debate," *Parameters* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 92.

16. For "day of dictator," see George H. W. Bush, "Remarks to the Council of the Americas, May 2, 1989."

United States of America has had both the moral standing, and the means to back it up. We are the only nation on this earth that could assemble the forces of peace.” He called this responsibility “the burden of leadership,” yet implicit in the very construction of leadership was an awareness of followers and their views. It is undoubtedly true that the sea of oil beneath the Persian Gulf made the defense of Kuwait seem necessary to Bush’s foreign policy team. Yet it is equally true that Bush believed an important principle of future stability at stake in rebuffing Iraq’s aggression against a United Nations member state, while simultaneously allowing the United Nations itself to fulfill the stabilizing promise of its founding. As Bush explained in 1991, “nothing of this importance” had happened in the world “since World War II.” Sometimes realism and principle coincide.¹⁷

Bush’s respect for sovereignty, when coupled with his realist’s sense that state sovereignty remained an immutable pillar even in a world in the midst of transformation, undergirds his reasoning for Washington’s moderate response to the Tiananmen crackdown. Washington did not wield the ability to impose its will on China during or after the prodemocracy protests of 1989 provoked a bloody response by government authorities. There was little an American president could actively do for the sake of oppressed protestors, Bush contended, no matter how great American sympathy for their plight. The American military was simply not capable of coming to the aid of China’s democratic movement, and economic or political sanctions were far too slow, if effective at all, to aid in the defense of out-gunned activists. Yet neither did Bush believe an American president had the right to tell a great power how to manage its internal affairs, no matter how distasteful their actions. Ronald Reagan had called the Soviet Union an “evil empire” largely for the way its ruling class treated their own people. Such words and tone were not in Bush’s vocabulary. When pressed in 1984 to elaborate on Reagan’s heated rhetoric, then Vice-President Bush toed his administration’s line. Yet he simultaneously cautioned reporters against making too much of such statements. He recalled that, when Washington’s chief envoy to Beijing in the mid-1970s, “every day in China [I] heard the ‘red news and the blue news,’ the former filled with bombast, the latter with fact.” When he raised the contrast to Chinese officials, Bush recounted, they had merely “referred to empty cannons of rhetoric” as a way of excusing their tone and language. Words mattered less than action, Bush concluded; and while he had taken to heart the lesson that harsh words should be prudently employed, he also

17. For “world’s problem,” see George H. W. Bush, “Address to the Nation Announcing the Deployment of United States Armed Forces to Saudi Arabia,” August 8, 1990. For “nothing of this importance,” see Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 81. As James Baker later explained, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait provided an opportunity embedded within the structural crisis embedded within the end of the stable Cold War system. “The entire planet is in this madman’s [Saddam Hussein’s] debt. His brutal invasion of Kuwait provided the unexpected opportunity to write an end to fifty years of Cold War conflict with resounding finality” (Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*).

cautioned others to discount the fire of political language while searching for the substance.¹⁸

Bush took this lesson of the 1970s to heart when faced, as president, with a situation in China in which words proved his only available weapon. As there was little to do in response to Tiananmen of practical use save to bluster largely for the sake of domestic ears, Bush recalled from his earlier experience with the Chinese that bluster itself had little potential for positive international effect. Similarly, in 1987, Bush advised Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev not to worry if the impending American election produced heated debates over the future of East-West relations. "I told Gorbachev not to be concerned about the 'empty cannons of rhetoric' he would hear booming during the campaign, and explained what the expression meant," Bush recalled. "It was a phrase Chinese leaders, I think Mao Zedong especially, had used years before to describe their propaganda criticizing the United States. Don't worry about excessive bombast, they would say; look at deeds and actions instead." Bush suffered domestically for failing to achieve sufficient indignation in criticizing China's 1989 crackdown. He believed, however, that the long-term strategic goal of reengaging Beijing trumped any short-term political capital to be gained by further harming already tense relations through excessive rhetoric. That China's political liberalization has not matched its economic integration with the international system in the years since 1989 calls this conclusion into serious question, but the underlying notion that engagement led to liberalization is one Bush has never publicly refuted or retreated from: in his mind, because American-style values are inexorably universal, time and liberalization each remain on Washington's side. They need not be pushed, just as they need not be deeply questioned.¹⁹

Bush followed his own lead when dealing with China. By virtue of his service in Beijing, Bush considered himself qualified to serve, in the words of one

18. The definitive account of the American response to Tiananmen, in English, remains to be written. Until then, see the essay by Randy Kluver, "Rhetorical Trajectories of Tiananmen Square," in this *Diplomatic History* forum, as well as James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relations with China, From Nixon to Clinton* (New York, 2000); and James Mann, *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression* (New York, 2007). See also Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 86–111 and passim; Warren Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (New York, 2000), pp. 195–242; James Lilley, *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia* (New York, 2004), 297–342. Particularly useful for scholars are the document compilations of the National Security Archive, including the numerous electronic briefing books detailing Sino-American relations in the 1970s, as well as Michael Evans, "The U.S. Tiananmen Papers," June 4, 2001. For a further discussion of Bush's long-term experience with China, see also Engel, *The China Diary*, 458–63.

Bush had in fact employed the term "cannons of rhetoric" while UN Ambassador, in reference to the newly seated Chinese delegation. After Qiao Guanhua delivered a blistering assault on the United States in the General Assembly, Bush chastised Qiao for his "intemperate language," noting that it was "disturbing" to see the Chinese "firing these empty cannons of rhetoric" ("Peking's Wordy Debut," *Time*, November 29, 1971). For Bush in 1984, see Jack Rosenthal, "George Bush's Daily Dilemma," *New York Times*, September 25, 1984, A26.

19. For Bush and Gorbachev, see Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 5.

National Security Council (NSC) staffer as his own “China desk officer.” The veracity of this assessment can easily be challenged when one considers that Bush did not speak or read Chinese, was not particularly immersed in Chinese history or the cacophony of the country’s more recently turbulent politics, and had not during the 1970s or afterwards developed the kind of intimate relationship with Chinese leaders that he desired. No one in President Bush’s inner circle offered such challenges to his leading policy-making role toward China at the time, however. On the contrary, he actively controlled American policy toward China during his presidency and during the Tiananmen crisis in particular.²⁰

In a well-known story, Bush wrote privately to Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping (a man he had met first in 1974 and subsequently cultivated as a contact) in hope of preserving a future for Sino-American relations even while offering sufficient public criticism to express American outrage and protect his own political flanks. He eventually sent envoys (Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger) to China in order to deliver the same message in person. “While angry rhetoric might be temporarily satisfying to some,” Bush explained following his presidency, “I believed it would hurt our efforts in the long run.”²¹

Bush’s record is hardly immune from critique, and indeed his near monopolization of China policy during the first real crisis of his administration stands in sharp contrast to the more diffuse managerial style he typically employed, as described below. So too was Bush’s penchant for stability, and concurrent fear of overcommitment so often wrapped in the language of prudence, a source of the most oft-heard and damning critiques of his diplomatic record. Specifically, Bush was chastised after the Cold War for not doing more to halt the foreboding violence in Yugoslavia. So too was he criticized after the Gulf War for halting hostilities too soon; for not doing more to remove Saddam Hussein from power; and for leaving an aggressive despot astride one of the world’s most vital sources of oil even if his international coalition had fulfilled the letter, if not the opportunistic spirit, of its UN mandate to liberate Kuwait. In each case, Bush declined to escalate an American commitment with no easy end in sight. As conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote in the *Washington Post* only weeks after the close of that conflict, “The Gulf War promised to renew the traditional vision of America not just as a comforter of refugees but as liberator of peoples. After liberating Kuwait, however, President Bush declined the opportunity afforded us by our total control of the air to liberate Iraq.” This, Krauthammer concluded, “was hardly Bush’s finest hour.” Critics of Bush’s Gulf War performance grew in number throughout the 1990s. Their numbers, of course, have thinned since 2003. Yet a generation after such decisions, there remains little historical consensus about the long-term wisdom, and conse-

20. For “desk officer,” see Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 291 and Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 100.

21. For “long run,” see Bush and Scowcroft, Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 89.

quence, of Bush's policies in the Middle East and the Balkans. He only reluctantly engaged a Mid-East peace process after the Gulf War, for example, and did little to halt the cycle of violence that eventually consumed Yugoslavia. In each case, Bush deemed it better to do too little than too much. In each case, problems, violence, and instability far outlasted his time in power.²²

Just as Bush's rhetorical caution and strategic prudence each grew from his prepresidential experience, so too did most of Bush's diplomatic sense develop over the course of his long public career. Never a student of international affairs, either during his formal education or for that matter during the first decades of his career, he was until nearly the age of fifty a domestically focused businessman and politician. He turned to diplomacy in 1970 only after losing both his bid for a Senate seat from Texas and for a leading post within Richard Nixon's Treasury Department. Nixon named him ambassador to the United Nations as an alternative, leading in rapid order to other foreign policy jobs such as de facto ambassador to China, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and vice president with a largely international portfolio.

Thus, a man, once only concerned with domestic affairs, in time entered the White House with more direct foreign policy experience than perhaps any chief executive save for Herbert Hoover, John Quincy Adams, Dwight Eisenhower, or Richard Nixon. When pressed only two months into his presidency to suggest a predecessor he might choose to model, Bush first joked that "everybody looks better over time," while noting Hoover's "compassionate side," and his own similarly "elitist background" as Teddy Roosevelt. Yet when the conversation turned serious he immediately mentioned Eisenhower—one of his father's political associates and frequent golf partner—because he was "a fair-minded person, strong leader, and had the respect of his people," all of which ensured "he brought to the presidency a certain stability." That Eisenhower led one of history's grand international coalitions in war should not be overlooked for what it reveals about Bush's choice of role model.²³

Bush's service in the Nixon and Ford administrations working for and with Henry Kissinger, and his years as vice president to Ronald Reagan, left the most enduring of all his prepresidential impressions. During the latter period, he was frequently handed responsibility for meeting and even negotiating with foreign leaders and dignitaries visiting the United States. He visited sixty-eight foreign nations while vice president, and frequently joked that his regular attendance at

22. Charles Krauthammer, "Good Morning, Vietnam," *Washington Post*, April 19, 1991, A23. According to Bob Woodward, seemingly hesitant decisions made by the elder Bush while in office directly colored the very worldview of the younger Bush's most senior advisers, Vice President Dick Cheney in particular. Cheney, Defense Secretary under the first President Bush, "harbored a deep sense of unfinished business about Iraq," Woodward wrote, ensuring he would strike to stanch this pang whenever the opportunity arose (Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York, 2004), 9).

23. George H. W. Bush, "Remarks and Question and Answer Session at a White House Session for Journalists," March 31, 1989.

the funerals of foreign leaders provided the motto, “you die, I fly.” He therefore knew well the international cast of characters with whom he would subsequently deal when president, and, as noted below, for Bush all diplomacy became personal in time.²⁴

All three men—Reagan, Nixon, and Kissinger—left significant imprints upon Bush’s foreign policy style, though not necessarily as positive examples Bush desired to emulate. Reagan’s hands-off style of leadership, full of vision while devoid of details, left responsibility for implementation to deputies and required subordinates such as Bush to learn on the job. Such a management style led to strategic flexibility when put in the hands of skilled managers such as Secretary of State George Schultz. But it also allowed subordinates to freely interpret what they believed to be their president’s desires (or what could be justified in his name). Such freelancing resulted most dramatically in the Iran-Contra scandal. Bush was never formally implicated in such illegalities. But there can be little doubt that he took the oath of office in 1989 chastened by the scandal and by the limitations of his predecessor’s style. He consequently determined to be a different kind of president, conceding that Reagan “just didn’t pay that much attention to the detail behind policies. He just kind of knew in a broad sense where he wanted to be, or how he wanted to get there.”²⁵

Reagan’s hands-off approach was, in Bush’s words, “very different” from his own. In particular, Bush’s penchant for bringing advocates of different positions to his office for the specific purpose of debating in his presence the merits of their case before he made a decision proved a radical departure from Reagan’s preference for receiving a consensus view from his advisers. Bush’s “scheduled train wrecks,” as the policy debates he ordered to take place in his presence became known in the West Wing, conversely allowed him to witness not only his deputies’ decisions, but also their thinking. “I’ve been to Cabinet meetings when [they have] been a show-and-tell,” Bush informed his deputies upon assuming the Oval Office. “We don’t do ours that way.” So thoroughly did Bush and his principal advisers desire a fresh start to their own time in power that quickly after the 1988 election they demanded the wholesale departure of Reagan’s national security team not only at the highest levels but also throughout Washington’s foreign policy bureaucracy. “This is not a friendly takeover,” Baker frequently remarked. “When Bush came in,” concluded long-time

24. Several claim to have coined the phrase “you die, I fly.” See Bush, *All the Best*, 321.

25. Reagan has himself come under new historical scrutiny of late. See John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York, 2007); Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture During the Reagan Years* (New York, 2006); and John Arquilla, *The Reagan Imprint: Ideas in American Foreign Policy from the Collapse of Communism to the War on Terror* (Chicago, 2007). Also useful are Kiron Skinner et al., eds., *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (New York, 2004); Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries* (New York, 2007), mentioned above. For Reagan and Bush in historical context, see Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era* (New York, 2007). For Powell and Baker, see Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 5.

diplomat Dennis Ross, “he wanted to unlearn the lessons of the Reagan Administration.”²⁶

Ironically the most dramatic attempt to differentiate the administration’s stance from Reagan’s, the well-publicized “strategic pause” in Soviet-American relations designed to give Bush’s aides the opportunity to reconsider Soviet intentions and recalibrate Washington’s stance towards Gorbachev and the wave of change fomenting behind the Iron Curtain, led to little innovation in the end. Indeed, Bush’s team was by and large warier of Gorbachev’s intentions than Reagan and his team had been; when pressed by uncertainty, they fell back on well-worn tropes of power, prudence, and pause. “I think the Cold War is not over,” Scowcroft publicly admitted only two days after Bush took the oath of office. Gorbachev “badly needs a period of stability, if not definite improvement in the [East-West] relationship so he can face the awesome problem he has at home.” More dramatically, Scowcroft said he also thought Gorbachev was “interested in making trouble within the Western alliance, and I think he believes the best way to do it is a peace offensive, rather than to bluster the way some of his predecessors have.” Such intentional lethargy in response to Soviet initiatives frustrated Gorbachev. “What were they waiting for?” he privately fumed. Swift innovation was not the Bush administration’s hallmark, however, even if Reagan’s detached vision of leadership had enabled seismic policy transformations. Stability was their byword. Standing with French President Francois Mitterrand at his side, Bush eventually called for engagement “beyond containment,” though he cautioned that “though hope is now running high for a more peaceful continent, the history of this century teaches Americans and Europeans to remain prepared.” As Bush concluded, “in an era of extraordinary change, we have an obligation to temper optimism—and I am optimistic—with prudence,” because, despite what Reagan hoped, “it is clear that Soviet ‘new thinking’ has not yet totally overcome the old.”²⁷

Henry Kissinger’s negative example was equally important to Bush’s development of a personal style of diplomacy. Bush served under Kissinger both as

26. Parmet, *George Bush*, 263. For “train wreck,” see Michael Duffy, “Mr. Consensus,” *Time*, August 21, 1989. For Baker and Ross, see Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 264–66, who further argues that the entire foreign policy structure of Bush’s administration grew as a direct result of failures witnessed by its participants in previous administrations. “The Kissinger-Nixon obsession with secrecy, The Kissingerian-ubermensch-centric policy processes, the Vance-Brzezinski and Shultz-Weinberger battles, the perils of ‘operationalism’ that led to Iran-Contra, the paranoia of Nixon, the micromanagement of Carter, and the disconnectedness of Reagan all were signposts indicating what paths not to take” (Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 269).

27. For Cold War “not over,” see David Hoffman, “Gorbachev Seen as Trying to Buy Time for Reform,” *Washington Post*, January 23, 1989, A1. For “waiting for,” see Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York, 1996), 496–97. For “undermine,” see Anatoly Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev* (State College, PA, 2000), 215. For a discussion of the Bush Administration’s “strategic pause,” and its subsequent policy of “beyond containment,” see Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 1–26. For “burned,” see Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad* (Lexington KY, 2008), 24.

UN Ambassador, and then while Washington's chief envoy to Beijing. In each instance the two men clashed, though less about policy than style. Put simply, Bush rejected Kissinger's monopolization of the president's ear, who as a consequence of Watergate—which preoccupied Nixon and brought the domestically focused Ford to power—dominated American foreign policy to an extent rarely equaled by an unelected official.²⁸

Bush recoiled at Kissinger's power and style. "Kissinger is brilliant," Bush recorded in his diary after witnessing meetings with Chinese officials. He possessed a "tremendous sweep of history and a tremendous sweep of the world situation." Yet he was difficult as well. "It is a great contrast to the irritating manner he has of handling people," Bush wrote. "His staff is scared to death of him." It was not simply that Kissinger's gruff manner cut against the grain of Bush's own much-stated preference for civility. Rather, in Kissinger he viewed America's foreign policy to be too focused on one man, resulting in a president that was therefore too insulated from varied opinions and information sources, and thus hamstrung almost by definition. "I am wondering if it is good for our country to have as much individual diplomacy," he recorded in his private journal. "Isn't the president best served if the important matters are handled by more than one person?"²⁹

His own answer to that question was that the president was in fact best served by the airing of multiple opinions. Moreover, the American system—and by extension the broader world system—was best served by upholding the central tenets of American success as Bush considered them, being democracy, trade, and free markets, rather than letting any single individual do too much to alter a recipe that, to his mind, was clearly bound for success. Certainly Scowcroft, who over his career worked closely with both men, believed that Bush internalized his own desire as president to cultivate a variety of information sources as a direct result of his frustrations with Kissinger. "What he [Bush] learned from Kissinger was don't depend on only one single voice, however good that one voice is," Scowcroft later recalled. "That's not the way he thought he ought to get his information [while President] . . . what he wanted was to hear strong people, knowledgeable people, argue points of view in front of him. And that's the way he really developed what the whole policy issue was; what were the salient questions; what were the points where people disagreed. That helped him make his decisions." If one requires a mantra for understanding Bush, it is

28. Kissinger is, as readers of this journal well know, the subject not only of a wealth of literature, but also the subject of a recent historiographical revival. While Kissinger's underlying psychological motivation for seeking complete control over American policy continues to puzzle historians, the existence of his manic desire for control is unquestioned. For discussion of the current literature, see Jeremi Suri, "Henry Kissinger, the American Dream, and the Jewish Immigrant Experience in the Cold War," *Diplomatic History*, 32, no. 5 (November 2008): 719–47.

29. For "brilliant," see Engel, *The China Diary*, 97; For "individual diplomacy," *ibid.*, p. 75; for "difficult to define," see *ibid.*, 57; "clearly," see *ibid.*, entry for June 16, 1975.

this unquestioned faith in that system in which he was raised—and from which he had greatly benefited—to succeed over time so long as stability reigned, chaos was avoided, and strategies were freely debated.³⁰

That Kissinger and Bush came from radically different backgrounds—one an intellectual and a Jewish immigrant, the other from the very center of the American establishment—certainly contributed to their clashes. One cannot leave the topic of Bush and Kissinger without noting this additional source of tension. Each arguably looked at the other, and saw a man who simply did not belong in the Oval Office advising the president. Indeed, during one infamous argument between the two following the tense UN debate over Taiwan's status within the international body, Bush perhaps inadvertently revealed his true impression of Nixon's chief aide. "I told him my only interest was in serving the President," he later recorded of their heated disagreement, "and told him I damn sure had a feel for this country," reminding Kissinger that he did not work directly for him and implying that he considered Kissinger's own newcomer's understanding of America and its politics deficient.³¹

Cooler heads eventually prevailed, but the residue of this exchange proved bitter, as did Kissinger's long-term, if unexpected, influence over Bush's diplomacy. Bush's friendship with Scowcroft, for example, blossomed from his discomfort with working directly with Kissinger. "One of the reasons he and I communicated so much" when Bush was in China, Scowcroft later concluded, "was that he thought Kissinger pulled the rug out from under him at the U.N." Bush repeatedly rebuffed Kissinger's efforts to reenter government service while he was president, and more than a few commentators have noted that George W. Bush's first-term overtures to Kissinger, and to similar political opponents of George H. W. Bush from the 1970s, including Donald Rumsfeld, might have their own psychological explanation.³²

Yet for all the senior Bush considered Kissinger an unappealing example of leadership, he eventually based much of his personal diplomatic style on the man, largely by consciously refining an opposite managerial approach and conception of personal diplomacy. Kissinger repeatedly warned Bush to be wary of mingling personal ties with strategic goals, even though he employed his own

30. Author interview with Brent Scowcroft, March 8, 2007. One is reminded of the oft-heard political barb from the 1988 presidential campaign that Bush was "a man born on third base who thought he'd hit a triple." It is worth noting when considering Bush's uncritical faith in the American system that had served him, and to his mind the country, so well during his life, that a player standing on third rarely chooses that particular moment to question the rules of the game.

31. For "damn sure," see Bush, *All the Best*, 155–56.

32. For "communicated," see author interview with Scowcroft, March 8, 2007. For Bush and Kissinger after the former's presidency, see, for example, Maureen Dowd, "Aux Barricades," *New York Times*, January 17, 2007; Maureen Dowd, "Don't Pass the Salted Peanuts, Henry," *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 2006, A31; Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York, 2006), pp. 406–10.

network of associates during his rise to power and after. “He seems to put no faith in individual relationships,” Bush recorded in his diary in late 1974. “It doesn’t matter if they [the Chinese] like you or not,” Kissinger advised during a private conversation in Beijing, because strategic calculations were all that mattered to great powers. One might well argue that Kissinger was not so much deriding the concept of personal diplomacy as he was striving to ensure that it remained his personal domain. Whatever his intent, Bush took a more dramatic lesson to heart, believing Kissinger devalued the entire concept of personal ties as a lubricant to successful diplomacy. “It seems to me however that he is overlooking the trust factor and the factor of style,” Bush wrote in his diary. “I do think it [personal diplomacy] is important.”³³

Bush never came to believe that friendship might trump national interest, but he simultaneously put great stock in the notion that friendship still mattered, concluding that leaders who knew each other personally might develop that little bit of trust necessary to better navigate the rough waters of the international system. Friendships made in time of calm would prove useful in moments of crisis, he thought, an approach learned over his lifetime in business and politics. He made a point, while ambassador to the United Nations, of visiting the offices of smaller delegations, despite having been tutored by predecessors that American dignity and power demanded he wait to be called on by them. The entire UN experience “taught me a lot about treating nations, large or small, with respect,” Bush recalled. “I got there, and called on the Burundi Ambassador. I thought the woman [in the office] was going to have a heart attack. . . . But I knew that that word would get all around the United Nations that we recognized and respected the sovereignty and the vote of every country there.” This was “just a difference in approach” from his predecessors, Bush said, “and maybe in the process [it] helped influence some political decisions.”³⁴

33. Engel, *The China Diary* entry for February 6, 1975. Bush mentioned the conversation with Kissinger, or similar ones to it (*Ibid.*, 60). He does not record in the memoir its specific time or location. The full quote is instructive: “I believed that personal contact would be an important part of our approach to both diplomacy and leadership of the alliance and elsewhere. Some feel emphasis on personal relationships between leaders is unimportant or unnecessary. Henry Kissinger once argued to me that these are no substitutes for deep national interests. He pointed out that the leader of one country is not going to change a policy because he likes another leader. I suppose there is a danger that one can be naively lulled into complacency if one expects friendships will cause the other party to do things your way, but I thought that danger was remote. For me, personal diplomacy and leadership went hand in hand.” Importantly, Bush notes that such relationships must be cultivated. “You can’t develop or earn this mutual trust and respect [from foreign leaders] unless you deliberately work at it.” Bush, *All the Best*, 60–61.

For “energetic plans,” see Records of the Policy Planning Staff, Winston Lord Files, box 375, China Sensitive Chronology: January–February 1975, From Habib and Lord to Kissinger, February 4, 1975, Record Group (RG) 59, lot 77D114, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC.

34. Author Interview with George H. W. Bush, July 8, 2005.

To Bush, diplomacy was no different than the remainder of human relations. When asked to describe his UN approach, Bush said he merely recalled his mother's advice. "Be kind. Don't be a big shot, listen don't talk. Reach out to people. [It] doesn't have anything to do with diplomacy; it has to do with life. Treat people with respect and recognize in diplomatic terms that the sovereignty of Burundi is as important to them as our sovereignty is. Slightly different scale I might add. But never the less this is just a value thing. This isn't any great diplomatic study from the Fletcher school or something. This is just the way you react to things." When president, Scowcroft recalled, "he would call foreign leaders, for no particular reason, just to say 'hi, how are you.'" More than just courtesy was involved. "When we really needed something, he'd go to them, and they were inclined to support us because they knew who he was, where he came from, and it just made a world of difference in our diplomacy."³⁵

Others who worked under Bush shared this experience. "Diplomacy was easy under those circumstances," Dick Cheney, Bush's Defense Secretary, later recalled of the Gulf War. "You show up in Morocco and the King is waiting for you. His old buddy, George Bush, has talked to him and, yes, he'll send troops. The strength of his [Bush's] personality, his experience, the fact that he dealt with these guys over the years and they liked him and trusted him," Cheney contended. Bush later said of his approach that he always "tried to put himself in the other guy's shoes," leading one prominent journalist to suggest "friendship is Mr. Bush's ideology, and personal diplomacy has driven his presidency."³⁶

Personal diplomacy mattered to George H. W. Bush, and served as one of the three fundamental pillars of his diplomatic style alongside his penchant for stability and sovereignty, and his faith in multilateral solutions to global problems. In each, Bush found a plank upon which to fulfill, in the post-Cold War world, what he considered the promise of the World War II generation. The world Bush handed to his successor in 1993 was not yet perfect. Neither are his decisions in office free from critique or moral hazard, especially his administration's clear preference for geopolitical stability over interventions based upon human rights, despite the prominent place Bush rhetorically afforded human rights in his new world order. But the world he handed over in 1993 retained the potential of the one he inherited in 1989. Believing conflict inevitable, Bush thought his role simply—and simultaneously profoundly—to keep the world moving in the right direction. He did not come to office seeking to transform the world. Neither did he do so, serving more as a midwife to transformation than as its instigator. He instead came to office intent upon leaving a stronger international system than the one he inherited, leaving as a result, an imperfect though promising world. As Bush himself noted of the Cold War and evidence

35. Ibid. For "he would call," see author interview with Scowcroft, March 8, 2007.

36. For Cheney, see Parmet, *George Bush*, 462. For "other guy's," see Maureen Dowd, "The Personal Means A lot these Days," *New York Times*, July 12, 1990, A14.

of a declining Soviet Union in 1987, before formally running for the White House, “There are those who say that all’s well, all’s fine, everything’s changed over there. And maybe they’re right and maybe they’re wrong and history will tell; [but] as we wait for history to render judgment, a prudent skepticism is in order.”³⁷

37. “Excerpts of Remarks for Vice President George Bush Announcement Speech,” October 12, 1987, David Bates Files, Vice President George Bush Series, Bush Presidential Library.